

DIRECTOR as DREAMER

Directing Strindberg's A DREAM PLAY

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Abstract

What does it mean for a theatre production to have “soul” or “spirit?” What choices can the director make, starting from the conceiving process, to encourage a production to find spirit? How do these choices factor into the questions around the theatre director as creative or interpretive artist?

In directing August Strindberg’s *A Dream Play*, I intend to answer these questions.

This paper looks at how August Strindberg crafted poetic autobiography into *A Dream Play*, and proposes a similar conceiving process for the director. The research is then followed by selected journal entries from the rehearsal process.

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE GATES OF HELL

"Here one must leave behind all hesitation; here every cowardice must meet its death."
Dante, *Inferno*, Canto III, 14-15

In Dante's *Inferno*, the door to hell reads "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." At the beginning of Dante's journey towards Paradise, he must first descend. And, uncharacteristic to the beginning of many epic journeys, the hero must "abandon all hope."

A Dream Play is one of Strindberg's "post-Inferno" plays, as it was written after his autobiographical novel detailing an episode of madness that he entitled *Inferno*. In Strindberg's *Inferno* (as is the case with Dante's) the story's main arc concerns a man descending. In Strindberg's case, this is a descent into madness. In both works, descending is a means for the rise, the climb toward heaven. Once a staunch atheist, Strindberg's later works reflect his embrace of spirituality. Strindberg and Dante's *Inferno* parallel the story arc of *A Dream Play*, a deeply autobiographical play. It begins with the Daughter of the Hindu God Indra falling toward Earth. On behalf of Indra, The Daughter makes it her task to see if humans have reasonable grounds for their many complaints, and report her findings back to her Father. As the story progresses, she becomes more human: she gets married, has children, and goes on vacation. During one of the darkest moments of the play, she realizes she has lost her connection to her Father, and may not have the power to travel back to the Heavens to make her report. The Daughter of Indra, like Strindberg, like Dante, must first lose all hope before ascension becomes possible again.

As a theatre-maker, I believe the director's task in the twenty-first century is to offer bold and arresting new work. I am also chiefly interested in the theatre's spiritual potential to uplift and enchant a contemporary audience. The majority of my directing work is with devised and original pieces. One central goal in pursuing my Masters is to clarify a creative approach to working with text-based plays. My pursuit leads me to questions central to my understanding of the director's role: when working with authored plays, is the director an interpretive or creative artist? In the pursuit of bold and arresting new work, that also seeks to uplift and enchant, does this project come into conflict with "telling the story" of the play or "serving the author's intentions?" I have set myself the epic task of directing *A Dream Play* with the fourth year and MFA acting students at York University as a means towards investigating these questions.

II. CHAPTER ONE

STRINDBERG THE POET

*Just as he who, with exhausted breath,
having escaped from sea to shore, turns back
to watch the dangerous waters he has quit,
so did my spirit, still a fugitive,
turn back to look intently at the pass
that never has let any man survive.*

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto I, 22-27

In the following chapter I will explore the dramaturgical and the personal: two fountains of information that seek to illuminate both the play's symbols and author's intention.

A. DRAMATURGY and PLAY ANALYSIS

Beside Strindberg's naturalistic plays, *A Dream Play* can in first reading feel like a random spurt of impressions. In his preface to the play, Strindberg speaks to *A Dream Play's* dramatic structure, explaining that it should be seen as:

quite firm and solid – a symphony, polyphonic, now and then like a fugue with constantly recurring main theme, which is repeated in all registers and varied by the more than thirty voices. There are no solos with accompaniments, that is, no big parts, no characters—or rather, no caricatures; no intrigue; no strong curtains demanding applause. The voice parts are subject to strict musical treatment and in the sacrificial scene of the finale, all that has happened passes in review, with the themes once again repeated, just as man's life with all its incidents is said to do at the moment of death... Now it is time to see the play itself—and to hear it. (*A Dream Play*, 269)

His call for “no characters... no intrigue; no strong curtains demanding applause” seems to fly in the face of the Aristotelian call for character, plot, and spectacle. Moreover, the play begins where many classical plays end, with a God coming down to untie the conflict, a *deus ex machina*. Written in 1901, just a few years after Nietzsche proclaims God dead, *A Dream Play*’s god is very alive. In this world, she is unable to untie anything. Daughter of Indra leaves offering crumbs of hope: she will tell her father that human beings do suffer. Strindberg also talks about the final scene as being “sacrificial—” an allusion to the tragic model and medieval mystery play. The play’s episodic structure, though less narrative than his first dream play *To Damascus*, also seems to suggest mystery play. The play is ripe with allusions between Daughter of Indra and Jesus Christ.

In Nietzsche’s first chapter of *The Birth of Tragedy* he quotes from Richard Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger*—the same opera that is being rehearsed in *A Dream Play*. The character Hans Sachs says:

My friend, that is precisely the poet’s work—
To figure out his dreams, mark them down.
Believe me, the truest illusion of mankind
Is revealed to him in dreams:
All poetic art and poeticizing
Is nothing but interpreting true dreams. (qtd in Nietzsche, 20)

This directly connects to the conversation between Daughter of Indra (also called Agnes) and the Poet near the end of the play. In reading *The Birth of Tragedy* with *A Dream Play* in mind, one can view *A Dream Play* as an interpretation of Greek tragedy. Strindberg's use of the word "polyphonic" points to its Dionysian quality, while the play's rich dream imagery is absolutely Apollonian. It is in dream that the Poet meets Agnes, and in dream where she explains the origin of the universe, thus tearing the veil of Illusion, through illusion. This is how Nietzsche describes it, when saying:

In relation to these direct artistic states of nature, every artist is an 'imitator', that is either Apollonian dream-artist or Dionysian artist of intoxication, or finally – as for example in Greek tragedy – simultaneously artist of dream and intoxication: such as we have to imagine him as he stands alone to one side of the infatuated choruses before sinking to his knees in Dionysian drunkenness and mystical self-abandonment and as, through the effect of the Apollonian dream, his own state, that is, his unity with the innermost ground of the world, is revealed to him *in an allegorical dream-image*. (Nietzsche 24)

This is the kind of clarity the Poet and Agnes achieve inside *A Dream Play*.

A Dream Play also borrows part of its narrative form from many other sources, including Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The Daughter of Indra's first task is to save the Officer, who is trapped inside a growing castle, which, as she says in the first scene has "seven walls" to get through (*A Dream Play*, 276). It is interesting to note the

allusion Strindberg draws here to Canto IV of Dante's *Inferno*, to the castle in Limbo with Seven Walls. The final image of the play is the blooming chrysanthemum: in Dante's *Paradiso*, when he finally reaches the Empyrean, he sees it as a large blooming rose where each holy spirit has its place.

There are a few other artistic influences to be gleaned. Strindberg openly references both Calderon and Shakespeare in his preface to the play, citing Prospero's "we are such stuff as dreams are made on," and Macbeth's describing life as "a tale told by an idiot." A similar theme arises with Calderon's *Life is a Dream*, and Shakespeare's *Tempest* and *Macbeth*, that is reminiscent of the Scottish King's "Tomorrow" speech, that "Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" (*Macbeth* 5.5.24-26). In each of these plays, a strong correlation is made between life versus dream, and also life versus art. Human beings are "players" in our own poetic drama. Strindberg channels this in the scenes that take place "Outside the Theatre," where the real drama is being played out. In a scene that takes place in Fingal's Cave, the Poet realizes that the events of the play were actually from a poem he has written. If dream is an illusion, and if the stage is an illusion, then so is life.

B. POETIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I must acknowledge Eszter Szalczer whose book *August Strindberg* tackles questions of how to read the Swedish writer's autobiographies. It is commonly held that August Strindberg's autobiographies are to a certain extent manufactured for desired dramatic effect. Szalczer points the reader to Lagercrantz who writes "For

every phase of his life, Strindberg decided how he wanted to be understood and deliberately created a persona for himself” (qtd. in Szalczer 11). In wanting to look to Strindberg’s biography to evaluate just how he crafted autobiography into *A Dream Play*, I must be careful not to be too literal in how I use the term “autobiography.” This is why in most cases I opt for “poetic autobiography.” In the case of Strindberg’s Inferno and post-Inferno phase, Lagercrantz writes that it is important to consider that the author:

recognized (a region of Austria) as identical to the hell he read about in Swedenborg. The ravine resembled the entrance to the nether world in Dante. A pigsty by the road with its seven gates led his thoughts to the red-hot sarcophagi in Canto X of Dante’s *Inferno*... Strindberg did not believe in it as genuine identification: in his diary, he drew an entirely different building with six doors... he arranged things, and was not a victim of delusions. He was looking for metaphors and symbols to use in his novels. (qtd in Szalczer 11)

Speaking of Swedenborg’s influence on Strindberg, Szalczer adds:

In (Swedenborg’s) main works, he expanded his theory of correspondences, which profoundly informed Strindberg’s so-called dream-play-technique. Swedenborg proposed that by reading and interpreting signs scattered throughout the physical world, one might catch glimpses of hidden spiritual dimensions. This inspired Strindberg to see everything with a double vision and to suggest an apparent (‘exoteric’) and hidden (‘esoteric’) aspect of all things through visual analogies (Szalczer 29).

Authoring one's autobiography may always be filled with a degree of fictionalization and poeticism. In Strindberg's case, this poeticizing is intrinsically connected to his mystic beliefs. The symbols around him are biographical while also living in the realm of cosmic metaphor.

Michael Meyer, a Strindberg scholar, paints a portrait of Strindberg's life in the months spanning his writing of *A Dream Play*. Some of this information can also be gleaned by Strindberg's final autobiographical book in his volume, *From an Occult Diary*. The book compiles letters and journal entries from 1900 to 1908, and details his relationship with the actor Harriet Bosse. After falling in love and marrying, Bosse leaves Strindberg soon after. Michael Meyer sums up some key plot points:

He mediated suicide much that autumn... Yet on 4 October he dined with Harriet and they made love; the following day, three and a half months pregnant, she returned to live with him. Such was the background against which, over the next six and a half weeks, he composed A DREAM PLAY. He based it on a straightforward realistic play which he drafted earlier in the year, entitled THE CORRIDOR DRAMA. (Meyer ix)

The Corridor Drama is where the plot of the Officer waiting for his Victoria comes from. Meyer continues:

Strindberg stopped work on this when Harriet first left him that June, took it up again, according to his diary, on 22 August a few hours before he received a letter from Harriet telling him that she had left him for good, and finally,

after their reunion in October, reworked it as A DREAM PLAY (though when he completed it on 18 November he called it THE RISING CASTLE). (Meyer ix)

Strindberg seems then to sew together his earlier drama with a poeticized version of his relationship with Bosse. It is interesting to note that one of Strindberg's first encounters with Bosse is seeing her play Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As *A Dream Play* begins, Daughter of Indra notes, "It's past midsummer." Over the course of the play, one of the most striking images is Agnes' daughter Christine pasting and sealing the windows of Agnes' apartment, preparing for the impending winter. In *A Dream Play*, years pass in minutes, and seasons change in seconds. Perhaps Christine's preparation for the winter relates to Strindberg and Bosse's bright midsummer love beginning to frost.

When Bosse and Strindberg begin to meet regularly, he describes her presence as angelic:

Sometimes I think that (she loves me), sometimes not... If I only knew what it was. Up to now there have been as many premonitory signs for as against. On her last visit I felt as if an angel were in the room and I decided in favour of the good; hoping to achieve reconciliation with woman through woman. For three days now I have had her in my room and experienced an elevating, ennobling influence, which surely no demon could possess. (*From An Occult Diary*, 23)

It is also interesting to note a potential shift in Strindberg's infamous misogyny. Achieving "reconciliation with woman" probably holds a more symbolic significance for the author. Strindberg connects "woman" with Maya (the Earth), desire and love. On November 18th, when he finishes the play, he writes in his journal:

Am reading about Indian religions.

The whole world is but a semblance (=Humbug or relative emptiness). The primary Divine Power (Maham-Atma, Tad, Aum, Brama), allowed itself to be seduced by Maya or the Impulse of Procreation.

Thus the Divine Primary Element sinned against itself. (Love is sin, therefore the pangs of love are the greatest of all hells).

The world has come into existence only through Sin,-- if in fact it exists at all—for it is really only a dream picture. (Consequently my Dream Play is a picture of life), a phantom and the ascetic's allotted task is to destroy it. But this task conflicts with the love impulse, and the sum total of it all is a ceaseless wavering between sensual orgies and the anguish of repentance.

This would seem to be the key to the riddle of the world.

I turned up the above in my History of Literature, just as I was about to finish my Dream Play, *The Growing Castle*, on the morning of the 18th. On this same morning I saw the Castle (=Horseguard's Barracks) illuminated, as it were by the rising sun.

Indian religion, therefore, showed me the meaning of my *Dream Play*, and the significance of Indra's Daughter, and the Secret of the Door= Nothingness.

(*From an Occult Diary*, 55)

One can begin to see then how Strindberg's relationship manifests in one of the main conflicts of the play, mainly the one between Daughter of Indra and Officer, Lawyer, and Poet respectively (often assumed to all be representations of Strindberg himself). In his preface to Ingmar Bergman's adaptation to the play, Meyer explains, "The childhood scene with the Officer's parents is directly autobiographical; so are the marriage scenes between the Advocate and Agnes" (Meyer xii). Strindberg poeticizes his difficult relationship with Bosse to speak to what he sees as a kind of creation story or eternal battleground of archetypal energies. It is Agnes after all (who is both angel and cruel wife that leaves her husband) that exposes what is behind the door. Strindberg might argue that "woman" (the feminine impulse, Maya, desire) holds the key to grasping the ephemeral nature of the universe.

I also want to take some time here to provide context for other autobiographical components to be found inside *A Dream Play*. Meyer lists:

"The Rising Castle" in which the Officer is imprisoned was, as his diary implies, the new cavalry barracks with its gilded onion-shaped dome, which he could see from his windows... Like the Officer, he waited in the corridor of the Royal Theatre, first for Siri twenty years before, and more recently for Harriet. There was a door there with a clover-shaped hole, and he had often

wondered where it lead to. Fairhaven, to which the officer flees with Agnes, was the coastal resort of Fagervik.. just outside of Stockholm. Strindberg used to stay there with his brother-in-law...who had become a schoolmaster... Strindberg himself had a recurrent nightmare of finding himself a schoolboy again, threatened by the cane; hence the classroom scene... At Fagervik he had met a jeweller and art collector named Christian Hammer, who owned the island but had lost his sight. He too was to appear in the play as the Blind Man. In 1899, Strindberg had seen the Baths Doctor there, Elias Nordstrom, go to a ball wearing a Moorish mask; hence the Quarantine Master, Ordstrom with his blackened face and sulphur ovens (there had been a cholera outbreak at Fagervik some years before). Opposite Fagervik lay Skarmsund, which Strindberg, by the removal of a single letter, altered to Skamsund (literally Shame-Sound=Foulstrand). The incident of the degree ceremony probably stemmed from a rumour which had reached Strindberg's ears the previous year that he was to be given a Doctorate at the University of Lund (Meyer xii).

Evert Sprinchorn is less literal in his interpretation of the play's symbols, instead reading an immense Freudian subtext. He writes:

It takes no doctor come from Vienna to tell us what this castle stands for, with its ability to grow and raise itself, with its crown that resembles a flower bud, with the forest of hollyhocks that surround it and the manure piles that lie below. It takes all the imagination of a poet to conceive of it as a castle and only an adolescent's knowledge of anatomy to recognize it as a phallus...

If the castle is a phallus, the Officer represents the soul or spirit imprisoned in the body from whose peremptory demands it cannot escape. ... May not the grotto, the scene of symbolic birth, be the uterus? And may not the theatre corridor which separates the castle from the cave be the vagina?... The end to the conflict of male and female principles can come only with death. But death in this play has a double meaning, too. As the Lawyer and Daughter were united through the agency of the organ and the cave, so now the Poet and the Daughter are united by fire in the final moment. The fire suggests sexual excitement, dying signifies orgasm, and the bursting chrysanthemum on top of the castle is ejaculation poeticized. (Sprinchorn 360-362)

This interpretation is also extremely biographical, albeit in a more interpretive way. In early 1901, Strindberg's passages in *From an Occult Diary* surround his moral dilemma around "possessing" Bosse in his dreams, and his angst and guilt following. As Nietzsche continues in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

So the artistically sensitive man responds to the reality of the dream in the same way as the philosopher responds to the reality of existence; he pays close attention and derives pleasure from it: for out of these images he interprets life for himself, in these events he trains himself for life. He experiences not only the agreeable and friendly images with that universal understanding: but also the serious, the gloomy, the sad, the dark aspects of life, the sudden inhibitions, the teasing of chance, the fearful expectations. In short the whole 'divine comedy' of life, including the Inferno, passes before

him, not only as a game of shadows – since he participates in the life and the suffering of these scenes – yet also not without that fleeting sense of their status as appearance. (Nietzsche 20)

With this in mind, his *A Dream Play* seems then to be a poetic report of his life.

C. THE DIRECTOR'S APPROACH

A Dream Play is ripe with signs and symbols, and there are countless interpretations from scholars regarding what each one represents. Strindberg in his Preface writes that what ties it all together is “the logic of the dreamer.” Indeed director Katie Mitchell in her version of *A Dream Play* identifies “the dreamer” as The Officer. Sprinchorn writes that:

It is only one more step to see that Strindberg intended that all the men coalesce into one male and all the women into one female. He seems to have thought of his play as basically a two-character drama, and in an early version he listed the dramatis personae under two headings: The Man and The Woman. Then, finally remembering the bisexual nature of man, the subjective nature of the play, and the egocentric nature of dreams, we must allow the two characters ultimately to fuse into one; and it is absurd to ask, as some cavilling critics have, which of the thirty characters in the play is the dreamer. (Sprinchorn 357)

On one level, the dreamer must be Strindberg himself. On another level, as the director must conceive the play's “world,” one must ask how to ground these dream-images in one character's truth. Who is the fictitious dreamer? Although we never

see the dreamer, is it logical to assume that (as it is obviously Strindberg) the central characters are the Officer, Lawyer, and Poet?

Here is where I encounter the first directorial choice that borders on authorship. My research and analysis indicates that these three men are three facets of one man, and that man is most likely the dreamer. Agnes in this case is Dante's Virgil and Beatrice, the guiding light through the dreamer's psychic toil. Before beginning this research, and based on my first reading, I found myself immensely moved by Agnes' journey. In this reading, Agnes was Dante, slowly becoming more worn by the horrors and suffering of this world. Agnes is not strictly a representation of Bosse: there is a great deal of Strindberg in her as well, and potentially Strindberg's sister who was battling with mental illness at the time. A Jungian might identify Agnes as Strindberg's anima and soul, longing for communion. Interpretation aside, one of my tasks with this play is to decide who the dreamer is, so that I can build their psychic world accordingly. Alongside this is one central question of this thesis: if I yield to my own poetic autobiography, and follow the impulse to cast Agnes as the play's dreamer, is there an essential part of the story lost? Sprinchorn writes:

It would of course be grotesquely wrong to emphasize in a production the notions I have put forward, as grotesquely wrong as it was for Olof Molander, the pioneer Strindberg director in Sweden, to substitute a cross for the castle in the final scene. Most people, apparently, cannot accept the lesson of the door-opening scene, and they must make life and dreams palatable by imposing on them a higher, sublimated meaning. (Sprinchorn 363)

I see his point. Oftentimes the choices of the “creative” director (as opposed to the “interpretive”) are accused of being too self-reflexive or distracting to the play’s story. Before I engage with my own process of conceiving this play, I will take the next chapter to look at other directors and how they have approached this play.

III. CHAPTER TWO

THE DIRECTOR'S WORK

*As one who sees within a dream, and later,
The passion that had been imprinted stays,
But nothing of the rest returns to mind,
Such am I, for my vision almost fades
Completely, yet it still distils within
my heart the sweetness that was born of it.*

Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII 58-63

In this chapter, I will be looking at a production history of *A Dream Play*, paying specific attention to how directors have approached this play and have justified their creative choices.

A. BRIEF PRODUCTION HISTORY AND DIRECTORIAL CHOICES

In the last chapter, Sprinchorn mentioned briefly Molander's production, which at the time was considered a success. Regarding his directorial concept, Molander explained that:

He felt this was the most autobiographical among Strindberg's plays...

Strindberg represented life exactly as he experienced it and therefore 'his dream images have an incredible reality', which justified Molander's realistic – or rather, as he called it in an interview, 'hyper-realistic'—presentation of the play.... One of the innovations of Molander's production – directly related to his biographical reading of the play – was his identification of the three main male characters with Strindberg. (Szalczer 153)

Here, the director went so far as having The Poet wearing a Strindberg mask.

Szalczer continues "while Reinhardt's staging of the play had been noted in Sweden

for its ‘foreignness’, Molander capitalized on audiences’ familiarity with the dramatist’s life and the Swedish milieu” (Szalczer 155). Molander takes the autobiographical nature of the play seriously, and in rooting its truth directly within Strindberg’s life, he built a successful rendering, which audiences understood. This would not be the case in present-day Toronto. Molander’s production is certainly a product of its context. His production seems to strive for a kind of realism. As one critic noted at the time, “dreams do not stylise. They are realistic in their details (Bark qtd. in Szalczer 153).

Antonin Artaud also directed *A Dream Play* in 1928. This was a theatre event that inspired riots between Artaud and Breton alongside the Surrealists. Not much is known about the production itself. Szalczer points out:

Two extant photographs taken at the performance of *A Dream Play* show how Artaud would use spotlights to illuminate certain isolated areas of the stage and create startling effects by ‘violent’ contrasts. Both photographs reveal a simple set on an almost bare stage: just a curtain in the back and a few individual set pieces. One of the images shows two tall ladders centre stage, stretching into the flies, framed by two symmetrical square spots on the back curtain lit with a bright light. (Szalczer 151)

Given Artaud’s preoccupation with the mysterious and the uncanny, it seems here that his production aimed to stage the subconscious and subterranean. The setting is both the simple theatre space, and the brain of the dreamer. Szalczer notes that with Artaud’s production of *The Ghost Sonata*, Artaud:

developed a *mise en scene* where the play script had no supremacy over other – visual and aural – production elements. Rather, the dialogue became part of a dissonant sound track, as actor’s live voices mingled with distorted voices of dummies amplified through loudspeakers, and various other shocking or mysterious sound effects... However improper this treatment might seem, Artaud’s production seems to have transposed the surrealist aesthetics into the stage while embodying the fundamentally Strindbergian revolt against conventional bourgeois theatre. (Szalczer 148)

Here, the director’s choices are tied to what Artaud imagines Strindberg was trumpeting with this play. We also see an early form of auteur-ism on the stage, with Artaud giving the actor’s bodies and soundscape equal importance to the playwright’s text. Artaud also has a conceptual justification for his choices that he identifies as true to Strindberg. During the riot, Artaud yelled “Strindberg is a rebel, like Jarry, like Lautreamont, like Breton, like me. We perform this piece as a vomit against his country, against all countries, against society” (qtd. in Szalczer 147).

Many well-known directors have interpreted *A Dream Play*: Max Reinhardt, Ingmar Bergman, Robert Lepage, and Robert Wilson. Lepage and Wilson are notoriously considered “auteur-directors” for their emphasis on design and stage picture as being an equally important language to that of the text. Lepage’s set was a rotating cube hovering over a body of water, which had no actor ever touch the floor.

Bergman restructured *A Dream Play* casting the Poet as the main character, and

cutting what he thought to be unnecessary dialogue. A more recent and radical example of this kind of directorial authorship comes from Katie Mitchell's 2005 production of *A Dream Play*.

Mitchell asked Caryl Churchill to make an adaptation of the play to begin working with. Churchill opens her introduction to the play asking:

Is it a larder? Is it a fridge? Is it more fun, more vivid, or even more true to what Strindberg meant, to update the larder door which is just like the one the officer saw when he was a child? A larder's where the food is, so does a fridge give us more directly without archaism, the promise of satisfaction of appetite? And make it easier to see why the characters hope that if they finally get the door open they'll find the meaning of life inside? Or is it a silly idea and a modernism too far? (Churchill v)

Churchill's questions confront the essential problem when approaching this play. The question of "what Strindberg meant," like in the case with Artaud and Molander, is at the forefront of anyone hoping to approach enlivening this play. Churchill contends:

I'm not sure how I'd feel if someone treated one of my plays the way I've treated Strindberg's even though I hope I've made it clearer and not spoilt it. I wouldn't like it now, but perhaps when a play is over a hundred years old you should just be glad it's still being done. And it survives unharmed in Swedish. I'd like to think he'd be glad about this version. (Churchill vii)

In her version, Churchill changes the castle into an office tower being built, the coal miners into construction workers, and like Bergman, cut what she felt was unnecessary. Interestingly, Katie Mitchell used Churchill's version as a springboard for more authoring and collaboration with the actors and designers. She explains:

In order to find a theatrical language with which to communicate a dream, we studied our own and others' dreams... We decided only to select material that we could stage without clunky theatrical conventions.... After two months we finally created a performance that combines much of the original text with other dream material. Although it is a slightly different shape to that first imagined by Strindberg, it has at its heart the same impossible aim: to put a dream on stage. (Mitchell, www.theguardian.com)

Central then to Mitchell's production is what she identifies as the aim. "Putting a dream onstage" becomes the invitation for the director and team to author. Mitchell writes that they include "much of the original text." However, Michael Billington in a theatre review for *The Guardian* writes:

What Mitchell has done is shift the narrative focus. In Strindberg's play Agnes, daughter of the god Indra, descends to earth only to find life is a vale of tears. But here, although Agnes is present as a visiting angel, the pivotal figure is a 50s London stockbroker called Alfred. The action consists of a hurtling journey through his private dreamscape in which he searches for his lost wife and the meaning of life, yearns for his dying mother, witnesses love's decay and finds himself a harassed, solitary outsider. The result is to

change the play's meaning and perspective. (Billington,
<https://www.theguardian.com>)

“How do you direct a dream?” Mitchell’s article reads underneath its title. “By delving into your own subconscious,” it answers. This relates directly to my goal to begin conceiving this play in poetic biography. However, Billington articulates the line he finds is crossed. What right does the director have to change the central images of a play? And what happens when it, according to one reviewer, changes the play’s meaning?

IV. CHAPTER THREE

THE DIRECTOR DREAMER

*O Highest Light, You, raised so far above
The minds of mortals, to my memory
Give back something of Your epiphany,
And make my tongue so powerful that I
May leave to people of the future one
Gleam of the glory that is Yours, for by
Returning somewhat to my memory
And echoing awhile within these lines,
Your victory will be more understood.*

Dante, *Paradiso*, Line 67 - 75

In this chapter, I aim to discuss the conceiving process for this play. I will also then discuss how this funnels into creative choices and planning.

A. A MISSION

In an increasingly secular and digitized world, my artistic mission is to affirm the power of liveness, virtuosity, and the invisible thing called “soul” or “spirit.”

Liveness refers to theatre work that capitalizes on what makes theatre unique from film and television, the present moment. Virtuosity refers to actors mining the extremes of the human experience with grace and skill. “Soul” and “spirit” is more difficult to articulate. I hope to use the following chapter to explore how to find “soul” as it relates to my creative questions I began with.

B. THE DIRECTOR-DREAMER: A PROCESS

When reading a play, characters, colours, and images appear. I judge an evocative play by how I am captivated and moved on the stage of my imagination. Part of my task is to be true to how the play begins to percolate in my mind’s eye. What else do I have? I could begin with copious amounts of research on the characters, colours, images of the political context in which the play was written. But as a starting

point, that somehow does not seem true to the creative imagination, and perhaps “soul.”

In doing some research on dream analysis, I came across Robert A. Johnson’s book *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Imagination for Personal Growth*. Johnson lays out a method for a dream analysis that does not rely on dictionary definitions of archetypes. He also articulates a method for Active Imagination, a Jungian approach to conversing with the unconscious. Johnson writes:

The most important aspect of the androgynous psyche is the *soul-image*. In every man and woman there is an inner being whose primary function in the psyche is to serve as the *psychopomp* – the one who guides the ego to the inner world, who serves as the mediator between the unconscious and the ego. Jung became aware of the soul-image when he sensed a feminine presence within himself who pulled him toward the unconscious who embodied the part of himself that lived in the realm of dream and imagination. When she appeared in his dreams, he found she was a creature of mythical quality, seemingly magical and half-divine. Like Beatrice, in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, she led him to the inner world of the unconscious and served as his guide there.... Jung felt that this inner person corresponds to the traditional religious conception of the soul as the inner part of ourselves that connects us to the spiritual realm and leads us to God, so he referred to the feminine soul-image in men as *anima* and to the masculine soul-image in women as *animus*. (Johnson 47-48)

For Johnson, “the soul” is the mediator between individual and their unconscious, and therefore the mediator between individual and God. This is certainly the role Daughter of Indra plays inside *A Dream Play*.

Johnson lays out four steps for analysis of one’s dream. He labels them chronologically as: Associations, Dynamics, Interpretations, and Rituals. In the Association stage, the dreamer writes down every image in a dream, and beside each image, jots down personal associations with that image. The dreamer, in writing these, waits for one association to ‘click’ and make surprising sense on an intuitive level. In the Dynamics phase, the dreamer begins to draw parallels between these associations and the present-day situation of their own life. Only then does one begin to look through myths and stories for similar archetypes that reveal themselves. These archetypes are meant to expand the association and dynamics, not change or reroute them. From there does one begin the third stage of interpretation of the dream, by asking oneself what the unconscious is trying to communicate to the ego. Stage Four is the “Ritual” wherein the dreamer does something in waking life that acknowledges the message of the unconscious.

I find this framework interesting for the director’s task. In this case, the dream to interpret is the play upon first reading. And because it is not a product of the director’s unconscious, but that of the writer, the director must then rely on whether or not the play ‘clicks.’ When Agnes exclaims “my thoughts have lost their power of flight, there is clay on my wings, and I myself, I sink, I sink,” I was

immensely moved. At this moment in my reading of *A Dream Play*, something clicked, and I saw a part of me in this story.

From there, the director would begin in the personal with Associations. Starting with the strongest image in the play for me (Agnes loses her wings), I begin to write down every association I have with: angels, wings, falling, being trapped, etc. I do the same for the other images that are vivid in my imagination. I then also do this for images that are less vivid. On the first reading, I have trouble understanding who the Glazier is, though I write associations I have with the character, what he says, and his task. Then, I begin to trace out the dynamics of each of these for my own inner life. What is it about the fallen angel that speaks so strongly to me?

When Johnson recommends going to stories and myths, I propose going to author's biography, interpretation of their intention and, following that, archetypes the playwright uses. I can never truly know what the tower represents to Strindberg, but I can make a series of educated guesses based on my research which indicates that it is both a tall glorious new building for soldiers being built in Stockholm at the time (relationship here to industrialization, the military, etc.), the castle inside Swedenborg's and Dante's Hell, *and* the erect phallus of Strindberg's mystic wet dreams with Bosse. The director's job here is to begin to personalize this. Is there something in my life now that carries these associations? Churchill chose an office tower. My mind at first went to the gleaming new subway station currently being built on the York University campus. From here I move into archetypes. I

researched some of what Strindberg was reading at the time, but ‘clicked’ with a story that enraptures us both, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

From here I begin to articulate a concept, message, or premise, and begin to edit and form the script to communicate this. In this process, the director starts out as director-dreamer, and over the course of the process, becomes director-translator. If I suspend my disbelief and believe that my soul is in fact communicating something to me *through* this play, my process of “translation” is potentially just an euphemism for ‘authoring,’ though I know it is grounded in a deep and specific conversation with my intellect, my ego, and my unconscious.

C. THE SYMBOLS AND A PREMISE

I instantly associate the image of the fallen angel with depression. The very first play I ever directed was Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* and Virginia Wolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of my favourite novels. In Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Cleopatra loses Antony and proclaims “Women, women, come; we have no friend but resolution and the briefest end,” I feel she is talking to me. The *image* of “the depressed androgynous woman” is an archetype that strikes me deeply for a variety of personal reasons. Although my research on Strindberg indicates that Agnes is not the central character, my first reading and subsequent analysis drives me to pursue this thread with my production. It is a play about a wandering woman who, in seeing the suffering of the world, feels powerless and falls into a depression. By the end of the play, she somehow escapes this, and in finding hope, ascends.

I had a dream one night of a vibrant magenta peacock at the top of a hill, showing off its glorious feathers. Upon waking, I instantly associated this with the blooming chrysanthemum at the end of the play. A colourful peacock is a male, its rich magenta I associate with drag, with gayness, with unabashed celebration. The peacock is a symbol of vanity, but also in Christianity, of everlasting life. In my association with the “depressed woman” who is often by the point of depression, androgynous, the magenta peacock lives opposite to this: it is a celebration of the androgynous, a marriage of the masculine and feminine. In my production, do I stage a chrysanthemum or a magenta peacock?

As the dreamer, it is a play about my own perceived drab androgyny and depression. It is also a play about my relationship to human suffering and the God question. After a period of staunch atheism, I too am bringing God back to my life in tiny cautious doses, and am more and more suspicious of atheism’s disenchanted fingers laced in our society.

This brings me to my premise, which is indicative to where I am in my spiritual journey:

The crumbs of hope must satiate our unrest.

With this play, I want to propose the possibility of blind faith and hope as an antidote to depression, disenchantment, and grim and sarcastic cynicism. I conceive this in 2016, amidst Trump’s call for Walls, alongside the bombarding images of

drowning refugees. The accessibility of information in this digitized world is a crushing load that we have the torturous responsibility to witness.

D. PREPARATION

The creative process is difficult to map. Inspiration and choice never seem to have a clear point of origin. When beginning to speak with the play's designers, a few images have solidified which informed the world of the play through my eyes.

It is 2008: the year of the financial crisis, Barack Obama's "Yes we can," but also deep into the "War on Terror." Canadian forces are still in Afghanistan. Agnes is part goddess, part war reporter, sent down to witness and evaluate the suffering of humankind. Agnes' "falling" at the beginning of the play is both a literal falling from the heavens, but also falling into sleep, as the audience enters her subconscious dream world. Over the course of the play, beaten and withered by the complaints and violence she's had to endure, her project seems hopeless, and her ability to affect change becomes fractured. Just as she's lost hope, the Poet inspires her with a message to deliver to her Father. Something ignites, and she perseveres to open the Door for humankind, and to join her Father to tell him that human beings deserve His pity.

Strindberg calls for characters in this play to "multiply and divide." I have taken this literally, casting four actors in the role of Agnes, The Officer, and The Lawyer. In keeping with my thoughts regarding the play's connection to Greek tragedy, there will be a chorus of actors who take on the secondary and tertiary characters, while

also operating as Chorus. The staging will try to capture the quality of a dream, with scenes and images beginning in different parts of the stage, sometimes centred, sometimes behind or around the audience. Agnes' reflection that this world is only a copy of an Ideal World spurred my desire to have the same scene happen simultaneously, in different parts of the stage. This also was in part the impetus for having the play staged in the round. Each audience member has a separate point-of-view, and has the possibility to engage with separate "copies" of scenes. It is a world where technology calls reality into question by making duplicate images, but also a world where without a strong sense of community, the same scene is being played out in four different apartments, without acknowledgment of one another.

The number four carries many cross-religious connotations, while also being the number of sides to a square/rectangle, which as it happens, is the shape of the Joe Green Black Box I will be working in. In order to punctuate the 'wholeness' and invigoration Agnes gains in her scene with the Poet in Fingal's Cave I will be adding a small bit of new content. Before the Prologue where we see Agnes falling from the heavens, we will see the actor playing the fourth Agnes hospitalized, being led by a Doctor into bed. We will not see this Agnes throughout the whole play, until the scene in Fingal's Cave with the Poet. After the Poet inspires Agnes to keep course, the fourth Agnes will join and lead the other Agnes' with gusto to open the Door in the next scene. I am therefore adding a frame to the play: it is as if this is the dream of a woman, who was a war reporter, who is now hospitalized for suicide watch. It

is only at the darkest moment of her dream where she gains strength to become active again.

To transpose this story into 2008 and under the circumstances above, I will be editing the play. I will be adapting and changing some of the current translation I am working with, in order for it to sound more contemporary. I aim to keep some of the heightened language in this early translation, as a way to preserve its sense of 'other-worldliness.' As mentioned, I will be adding small moments of stage action to contextualize this particular through-line I want to follow.

In this project, I will be working with twenty-two actors, with twelve actors quadrupling as the three main characters. The beginning of the play calls for Daughter of Indra to be falling from the sky, and the end of the play asks for a chrysanthemum to bloom on top of a castle. As mentioned, I am also working in the round, and am working with simultaneous scenes. On top of this, unlike the majority of my devised creative work, I must make firm design decisions months in advance to begin costing and building. There are many "firsts" for me with this project.

It will demand a great deal of prior organization and concrete choices to begin exploring during the first week of rehearsal. I aim to grid the rehearsal room with tape to create a technical map where the actors (and myself) can plot precise blocking to ensure the simultaneity is respected. Also, because actors are playing

multiple characters, I will need to plot each actor's placement and whereabouts to allow quick-changes and seamless transitions. This does mean that prior to the rehearsal period, I will block the play on paper, and use this as a rough guide to explore with the actors.

E. SOUL, SPIRIT AND THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

In speaking about the modern move to individualism, Charles Taylor explains:

People used to see themselves as part of a larger order. In some cases this was a cosmic order, a "great chain of Being," in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and our fellow earthly creatures... The eagle was not just another bird, but the king of a whole domain of animal life. By the same token, the ritual and norms of society had more than merely instrumental significance. The discrediting of these orders has been called the "disenchantment" of the world. With it, things lost some of their magic. (Taylor 3)

This provides a frame for my artistic mission. Taylor then goes on to speak about the move from inner or personalized spirituality to cultures of self-help and individual fulfilment. In this move toward individualism, ritual has lost its main function. This is partly the great difficulty for artists who want to engage in "the Holy." As Peter Brook writes:

I am calling it the Holy Theatre for short, but it could be called The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear has a deep hold on our thoughts... In the theatre we shy away from the holy because we don't know what this could be – we only

know that what is called the holy has let us down, we shrink from what is called poetic because the poetic has let us down. Attempts to revive poetic drama too often have lead to something wishy-washy or obscure. (Brook 47, 54)

Artists can no longer rely upon agreed-on symbols for the communication of their meanings. Individualism has brought greater social freedom, but also a world where each individual is the guard and gate to their own unconscious and poetic dictionary.

Looking now at my creative mission, I have a greater sense of what I actually mean by “To reaffirm the power of liveness, virtuosity, that invisible thing called soul and spirit.” If ‘soul’ is understood as the bridge between ego and the unconscious, ego and God, the power of “soul” can only be tapped if one takes their own fateful steps into their unconscious. If *A Dream Play* is a product of Strindberg’s journey into his unconscious, one can hope that the director’s task to do the same thing can be equally resonant and powerful for an audience. The director’s imagination here can in part be the conduit for individual audience members’ greater connection to their own unconscious.

Central to the work of two directors I deeply admire, Jerzy Grotowski and Antonin Artaud, is the actor as conduit. Experimental theatre director Richard Maxwell, in describing a powerful moment he had as an acting student explains:

There was no “character” that I can recall, at least not in the modern psychological sense. The sense was that I was somehow momentarily *fulfilled*... What you carry forward is being your best, caring about other people, accepting who you are, and *allowing yourself to be fulfilled*. Your devotion should allow for possibility to tap currents of feeling and time. Avail yourself to epic states of “more”—joy, tragedy, sorrow. You’re a conduit for life’s forces. They channel through you. By allowing in, there is an absorbing of “character” within the root of who you are. (Maxwell 79)

‘Being fulfilled’ and ‘devotion’ can also be recognized as the language of spirituality. And indeed, the theatre’s roots in ritual and religion as described by Richard Schechner are certainly close to my heart. How do I ‘affirm the power of spirit?’ In the end, I cannot. In the end, the action is in the relationship between actors and audience. I therefore must leave this investigation to begin my next one: how to inspire the actors to take the journey into their unconscious, to become part of the production’s dream-weaving, and therefore to be the invitation for the audience to touch enchantment.

V. CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMATION

I aim to embark on a process that poses both great conceptual and organizational challenges. My mission is to direct a play that “affirms the power of liveness, virtuosity, and the invisible thing called spirit/soul.” I have therefore proposed a conception process that begins in poetic autobiography, and that aims to connect this autobiography with research of the playwright and the playwright’s world. I must also inspire the actors to do the same for their characters. Therefore, there will be physical exploration in the rehearsal process to uncover ways of moving, repetitious gestures that hold a personal poetic significance to the actor. We will also look to tableau in religious paintings to inspire physicality and stage picture. The play’s rhythm and style will use simultaneity, mirror images, and sporadic environmental shifts of where scenes are happening (sometimes centre, sometimes behind the audience, sometimes around the audience). The audience should feel bombarded and surprised by the scenes shifting in, out, and around, just as they do in one’s dreams.

My premise aims to speak to current preoccupations around one’s responsibility in the face of tragedy, suffering and atrocity. “*The crumbs of hope must satiate our unrest*” is a call to see and empathize with the brutal bombardment of images, and to continue to direct one’s thoughts and impulses toward blind hope in our collective betterment. Perhaps praying to a god one may or may not believe in will help share the load.

My greatest personal challenge as I look toward design presentation and rehearsal preparation will be organization. I have never been one to pre-block a play, have a director's Bible, or begin a rehearsal process with many givens. The requirements of this play inspire me to do so. It is a process where I must balance the intuitive and the exploratory nature of delving into unconscious, with the director's task to make the invisible visible, to overlay form and structure, to graph, map, articulate and realize the stage in my dreams.

VI. CHAPTER FIVE

DIRECTOR'S JOURNALS

January 31st – Day before company meeting

I want to organize myself for tomorrow – so I can really communicate “the world.”

Part of me does not feel ready. I feel so unready—hardly a plan for rehearsal, just thoughts, feelings, and a few ideas. Preparation escapes me – I forget all of my action-ing, I should print my blocking notes – I am generally nervous. I am also still angry at S. I carry that like an invisible weight, which my ego can't see but is perceived by the eyes of others. It is a play about falling in love, and having to leave, about leaving, and making a change.

Feb 1st

The actual first rehearsal. And uncharacteristically, I'll be presenting research today, for a large portion of the night as well. The objective – to deepen the actor's relationship to the play's sensuousness, the feelings – and to set up expectations for the rest of the process. Perhaps I will say a word about the first read yesterday – light, funny, moments of sincerity. Though, at moments, a joke – an absurd joke. There is no room in the play for the actors to be commenting on the absurdity of dream logic. I should save this for my point regarding ‘the actor's responsibility.’ This process will be a dance between mapping, articulation, form versus feeling, the unconscious, the Dionysian. Part of my task I think is to form most of it, and be smart about the moments I leave for feeling, emotion, improvisation.

Feb 3rd

Rehearsal last night was generally positive. When running through the rough staging, I saw something that felt familiar, almost a copy of what was in my mind's eye without ever noticing it. Both fresh and familiar, already with emotional life (a bit).

K started rehearsal by asking if they needed to be there... They forgot they come on at the end of the scene, and was sitting there during table work inattentive and what looked like suffering. I left rehearsal with this sting, the lack of integrity, a feeling of being disrespected, but also I recognize under that, a feeling of judgment. Judgment and criticism of the IDEA (this is in my own mind, my own insecurity.) Either way, I need to speak to this, especially if it happens again – potentially a larger group thing. I need to see.. Some of the 4th years are committing, most have a sizable part... I feel (and perhaps am amplifying) the complaint in the room. My demon: to be liked and to inspire. I am on the slow path of purging this.

Feb 4th.

Yesterday was positive. The curiosity and discussion are rich – more than I could have imagined – and the moments are finding the dust of life. The officers need to find their feet, their character. And about the rescue from the tower: if the tower is a prison, and also the officer's place of isolation, but also masturbation, then the daughter teaches the officer that the secret of his true nature (divinity) can only be experienced through the pangs of love – outside. Loneliness is no liberation. And what happens to the officer then? He takes Agnes to Foulstrand/Fairhaven – he has a nightmare about his schooling. And we see him start again. What is the significance of the daughter, going to the tower to burn herself? The Tower of babel

(science/industry) is keeping us isolated? But the growing tower is also a plant... is it as simple as... the flower must die, because it's organic. The growing castle is also the yearning for the divine, to reach the heavens, which for Strindberg might in a sense mean woman... that orgasm and divinity are the same impulse.. death, little death.

Feb 9th

I'm having trouble with these large group scenes. I find myself less sure, less precise with my words, less confident. I feel much more confident in the smaller scenes.. the intimacy is some place I know how to work in, and I know how to use status.

Though I've been teaching classes of 24 students here. What's the difference? The aim. And the vulnerability. And the status. The first years are attentive because they're curious, want to learn, green. I have an actor, K, who looks like she'd rather suffer hell than be in the room. And this really bugs me. So unprofessional... lack of integrity. I'm BAFFLED. And feel offended. Which seems so ridiculous that I would feel offended by this one person's behavior. But I am. I need to talk to them. That much is clear. I showed two videos today: Pina Bausch's CAFÉ MULLER, and the Workcenter's LIVING ROOM. Portions. And I asked them to tell me what they saw. And they got it. They can articulate what we're going for, but don't know the physical path there... or perhaps this is because they're glued to their scripts. One thing has become clear about working with larger groups: planning rehearsal is like planning a narrative. It's important to consider when/how often you call everyone. Its like organizing a culture or community – those that are there sometimes, and those that are staples.

Feb 10th

Scheduling has been BY FAR the most difficult test of this entire project. At the beginning of this project, in the name of a humane rehearsal process, I wanted to welcome and work around the schedules of other people. This was, in my mind, a way to keep the actors happy. To respect their time, through doing gymnastics around their schedules, to make room for them to find time for rest, release, “me time.” On top of this, rules set at the top of the rehearsal process are not being followed. Coffee in the space, people on their phones. My impulse is to crack down. So disappointed by the malaise of the fourth year group. The few that spoil. Part of me is reminded of Agnes’ line “they’re all complaining, sometimes with their words and always with their eyes.”

To be continually sympathetic opens the door to manipulation. And that feeling of never quite knowing if I can trust an excuse, because it might be under the guise of manipulation, is poisonous. I don’t want this poison. Mistrust. Doubt. Or is it the violent reality? Acting training would say so. That we’re all using one another for personal gain. But what about the joy of working together? Of coming together as story tellers? Is it about being honest with them? Or does honesty open the door for more? My want to ‘open up the space to complaints’ why? To vent? To diffuse? To avoid it festering into hatred... An exercise for Saturday: a circle of complaint. We sit in a circle, for 15 mins one by one starting with my left, we go around the circle three times hearing a complaint or rant from each person. When you are done your complaining, you touch the next person’s leg and they go. Rule 1: you can say pass on your turn. Rule 2: it can be a silly complaint, a serious one, it can have to do

with this rehearsal process, with one another, etc. Nothing leaves this room. No one takes offence. Rule 3: after going around the circle three times, there will be a freestyle until the 15 minute mark, where anyone can speak, anyone can interrupt, build off of one another. When the alarm rings at fifteen minutes, we all shut up, and take a minute to breathe. Rule 4: I won't speak.

Feb 11th

The circle of complaint happened, and it was very successful. I started "I have a sense that some of you are not fully here. And so, I want to know where you are. And because this play has to do with complaining and suffering, we will go through a circle of complaint." I explained the rules. I think it successfully hit a few aims:

1. Agnes: to really hear and take in the real complaints of people, to give the other actors a concrete sense of what is meant by complaint and suffering.
2. To ask them now that we've purged, to bring their whole hearts to this work.
3. So I could hear. Instead of rushing to frustration and anger, and allowing frustration and anger to build and turn me against the actors... this was partly happening.
4. To clear the air. To build community between fourth years and grad.

My fear is that it might become too indulgent, a pity-party, or that I might open things up I wasn't ready to. Some BIG emotions yes. Though the structure of the circle, I thought, kept it brief and maintained depth. Whether or not it landed in my first aim, I will learn next week. Also, I then spoke to K who expressed that they were going through something immensely difficult, and wasn't sure if they wanted

to be part of the project. We spoke about mental health, I asked them what I could do, I proposed some solutions.

Feb 17th

Yesterday's rehearsal we finished transitions of the play – it ended with a pretty grand moment. I had no idea how to get the petals offstage, we tried one thing and another, and I asked the group, who put their brains together, and we figured something out, an idea that I never considered. And some expressed great satisfaction at this. It made me feel: AH! Getting that sense of ownership could require asking the actors for creative suggestions! The big mind, the collective mind, is always smarter than the individual. It was also a rehearsal of great pain. K again. This time, with their jacket on for the second half of rehearsal, waiting in the vom with their hood on, coming onstage half-assed, coming onstage at the wrong moments, on their phone in clear sight in the vom before they were supposed to come onstage. I asked K to please put their phone away, and they didn't answer, so I said thank you, and they did then. My heart started pounding. I feel like I'm in an impossible situation: If I call K out, they will shut down. If I say nothing, nothing changes. I met with K last week. I told K I wanted them on this project, I didn't mention changing their behavior... I forgot... instead I asked "What can I do to help you" and we came up with a solution. K decided to stay. But after last night, I feel spent, frustrated, at an impasse. I'm meeting K today. I need to ask K how possible it is to change their behavior. Its poisonous to the room. Even in our group check-in last night, A said they didn't feel supported by those around them. Which is fucking tragic. And how much of that is me? How much of that is letting them off the hook?

Wanting to be negotiable, kind, inviting? The theory goes, if I create a welcoming space, people will join somehow... but its like ENCOUNTERS... If you give people space to complain, or not to be present, then they'll take that opportunity.

Feb 23rd

I woke at 5am. In my dream, I'm in the theatre office at Concordia, downtown. I am walking down the hallway. I pass a few young gays who are working at desks. I go to the bathroom there. There are three Japanese (?) men, one is the leader, and he keeps barking "RALPH" in this awful sound. I go to the toilet. I fart loudly. I hear the three men making fun... he takes the pants off of both of the other two. I can see their penis through the hole of the door, but decide not to look. I change stalls, now to a stall that is more public. The other two men leave the leader, and he is barking at them. He comes running into the public stall, and yells in a way I don't understand. My response is "what the fuck!" and I wake.

The play is on my mind this early morning. If it's a cerebral load of crap. If it's actually enchanting.. And this fucking tower.. I want to tear it down. It makes any staging feel insincere, and greatly limits the kind of moments we can make. It's a puzzle. Why not knock it down? My gut is telling me that it could work. My first rehearsal with its parameters felt exciting. Now its become... maybe I'm bored and tired of it.. Maybe my anger comes from the fact that I don't know how to stage the end of the second last scene... back to my dream:

There's a sexual aspect to this, the glory hole. To analyze: Concordia theatre building... which is an office tower. Stuck in an office tower (like the play.) I am working with Encounters, my Montreal life... Hallway of Gays: reminds me of York...

walking through the hallways here. Bathroom: sexual and shameful, The officer in the schoolroom scene. Three Asian Men: Reminds me of the lawyers, the bullying in the final scene I can't solve, the foreign, the Buddhist? Leader I can't understand: flailing dictator... The two other men leave. Is this what needs to happen in that scene? The other lawyers have to leave? "Pulled in opposite directions" she says. What part of me is the Asian man—the leader who is gesturing and speaking wildly, the dictator?

March 1st: DIRECTORS NOTE

Suggestions for ultimate viewing experience :

1. There's a part of your brain that may rush to make sense and understand what you see. Tuck this part into bed, and kiss it goodnight.
2. Chances are, when sitting on a plastic chair for ninety minutes, part of your brain will start to complain. You may also remember that you forgot to unplug the straightening iron. That's alright. Allow your brain to swim between your personal complaints and what you see in front of you.
3. Remind yourself of four significant dreams you've had in your life up to now.
4. Listen to the play like you would to music.

March 5th

Yesterday was difficult but good. There was a confusion around scheduling – that's been the largest fuck up of this process. Scheduling, people showing up late, people reading their calls wrong... and since the beginning I was told that yesterday's rehearsal consisted of morning on deck, afternoon levels, and evening on deck – only to find out the night before that we didn't actually have Friday evening on deck rehearsal. We were told 'no' twice.. and I fought for it – the first time I said a "I'm very unhappy with how this happened" which seems so small and insignificant, but

for ME, an enormous step. Sometimes I think I'm a push over, that I make too many compromises, and it was good to feel myself without hesitation, stand up for what I needed: more on deck time. AND THEN, a few actors expressed unhappiness with having this evening rehearsal (other plans that they planned on doing) and I was close to cancelling the on deck rehearsal-- but something became clear – in my fight to create a 'humane rehearsal process' where people can find their 'oasis space' where actors could leave for auditions, when I gave my understanding when people were late -- If I offer the possibility of 'no rehearsal' then the actors will take it. Because, like everyone else, we want the greatest reward for the least amount of effort. As a director, I need to see that, and PUSH them to be their best selves, their whole selves. And so we had an exhausting evening run, and it was very good. On the scope of the show: it feels surprisingly simple, competent, but at the moment, forgettable... I don't know if there are any images yet that 'burn themselves into my mind.' Is it bold and arresting? Does it use liveness, spirit, soul?

Mar 10th.

The authoritarian in me came out during Q2Q—endlessly unhappy, stressed, trying to organize and control time. This was partly due to the pace at which we were working, but we got what we wanted done. I've also taken out my whip in rehearsal twice now. No real success. --- JOURNAL INTERRUPTED. 8 hours later. Will first speak about what is immediately on my mind. Rage. The Quarantine Master's suit is way too loud. I've said it a few times. I just now ruled it out. T proceeded to tell me that we don't have time, etc. T wants the suit. When T said "we don't have the time" WOW, I felt something dark drop in my gut. Violence. It scared me. I stayed polite,

reminding T that we have up to opening to make changes. Nothing mean was said or done. And I left. Giving the “okay” to the second choice. It went the best it could have gone, but WOW. My legs were just shaking. Fight. That’s over. For now. The dictator has come alive a few times.. I’ve blurted things in rehearsal. Most recently “get off the stage” in good humour, but I surprised myself. My shadow. Its what came to me in that dream... the flailing inarticulate dictator. What could I have to learn from this archetype?

Yesterday was a good dry run. We’ve worked well and efficient today. Tech was slow, and sad. My big notes were about humour and staying ahead of the audience. We’re moving into another run tonight. A Dress. I’ve asked the actors to write 3-5 sentences that describe their process up to now, so that I can evaluate if I got what I was searching for: to inspire the actors to take their own journey into their unconscious... A bit about Fingal’s Cave: I had the actors the other day in, to work the scene. “Something is missing.” The actors left rehearsal more confused. They answered with “But what exactly do YOU want” “is this what you want?” Part of me hates that question. Because I believe if the actor doesn’t know what they are doing, then it doesn’t matter if it’s “what I want” because it can’t be right. “What can I DO to get what you want?” I don’t know, I don’t know. It’s just not here. I said “continuity?” I meant “story”. What is the story of the scene?

Anyway, I felt like I cursed the scene – that I couldn’t really give notes about it anymore because it would always be met now with resistance. What I said to them when we got back: “Forget that whole rehearsal – just do what makes sense coming out of the previous scene. They did. A new thought about the scene came up. I

realized that I may have been crafting something onto the scene that wasn't there to begin with. I prefaced my comment with "At the risk of cursing this scene, I had another thought. Where we're at is good. In the spirit of trying things out for fun, and saying 'yes', can we try ___? They responded well. And it went well. Part of it came from my calmness. I had let go my anxieties of the scene and wasn't being too precious about it. I got distance from it, and told them that I trusted them. This is in contrast to the higher stress and anxiety in me during Q2Q and our notes. How can I find more calmness, detachment, and still animate my passion? There's something here to learn. (Realizing that anger and anxiety aren't bad things – I just don't feel completely in control of them. I let them control me.)

March 12th

Today is first preview. David Smukler came last night to our dress. His comments struck a chord on an intuitive level. He had some comments about voice: that the actors need to use the ceiling to communicate. And then spoke about the actor's responsibility to take the audience on a journey. To continue to command the audience's attention and insist they stay with the actor's images, archetypes, journeys. "Nothing in this play is anything anyone has heard before" and the actors must play this, and also access life, death, -- find connection between HADES and with the higher ethical self. ARCHETYPAL IMPORTANCE. Something I haven't been able to articulate but have been suggesting in my notes. SCOPE AND SCALE. How could I have brought this in more? So much focus was on where to stand, when to speak, and general story. Part of the archetypal archaeology is in the actor's repetition of the play. Though I could have insisted in each rehearsal to move past

the casual. How do I talk about the archetypal, the mythic, and what does that give the actor to play? And is “the mythic” something I can even bring up in a professional rehearsal?

March 14th

Opening night tonight. The show is beginning to lift off. The actors know it well. The audience has become more responsive. It still remains dense and difficult to decipher. Who I imagine are the 1520 students seem bored and anxious, confused and frustrated. I had a conversation with an ex student of mine, who started with “I’m not sure I understood it, but it was beautiful.” And so I asked her – what did you think it was about? “A daughter of a greek god who comes down to see if we suffer, and realizes we do” I said “yeah.” “And that other girl in the white dress, was she the dreamer, and the other Agnes’ are fragments of her?” I said “Yeah.” “Oh.” And I wonder what that’s about. She did understand the story. But something in her brain made her think she probably didn’t. Perhaps because of the openness of the interpretation... I do like to leave things open.. I do make images hoping to open up various interpretations and connections. Is this too vague?

I’ve been thinking about what to say to the actors tonight. I went from wanting to quote Artaud’s “acrobats of the heart” to wanting to quote Richard Maxwell “allow yourself to be fulfilled, and stay in beginner mind” to Martha Graham’s “Keep the channel open.” I even entertained just telling them about why I think theatre is important, the stuff of this thesis, about secular ritual, the importance of human spirit in the digitized age. All this seems too heady... Instead I’m going to ask a question:

“What is one of the central messages of this play?” Human beings deserve pity. Ask yourself, what role does your character(s) play in supporting or negating this statement. And who is the message for? The audience. Yes, the audience, like you, is a collection of individuals who complain, suffer, justify their lives in their own way. And if you could think back to our circle of complaint, the heaviness we came to was from twenty something complainers. The theatre has five times of this. Tell the story for the audience, and be their bright light. Tell them that they do deserve pity. That is who this is for in the end.

VII. CHAPTER SIX

EPILOGUE

*If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended.*

As I conclude this paper, I will use this final chapter to revisit and evaluate my goals for three phases of this process: conception, rehearsal, and performance.

A. CONCEPTION

I began intending to conceive the world of this play from poetic autobiography. I also intended to use this poetic autobiography as a springboard for adapting the text of the play. In doing so, my goal was to encourage the “spirit and soul” from the first moment of the process, hoping then it would translate through rehearsal and into performance.

This process was not as methodical as I originally intended. Instead, I found myself in meetings with designers quite early on in my own conception process. These meetings inspired a great deal of the play’s central symbols and metaphors. In the first few meetings, I brought in images, and sounds. The most central images were Thomas Eakins’ “Man Walking,” Rodin’s “The Gates of Hell,” and Gauguin’s “Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?” As a soundscape, I introduced ANOHNI’s album “Hopelessness.” The designers quickly followed up with images of their own. The costume designer, Rebecca Saunders, brought in Bosch’s “Hell,” and Gericault’s “Raft of Medusa.” Spencer Donnelly, the set designer,

began conceiving of a world of rusted metal: reminiscent of contemporary Detroit and a worn port town.

Our conversations were integral to my later adaptations within the script itself. Metal and coin became one central theme in the play. In the original script the Billposter has a “green dipnet” which I changed to a metal detector. The Poet originally comes on with buckets of clay, which I changed to buckets of coin. I also adapted the Deans of Education into government ministers. The Dean of Theology, who comes on in the final sacrificial scene to throw his prayer books into the fire was changed to the Minister of Finance, throwing coins into the fire, while expounding about the failure of capitalism.

In some ways, this felt like an archeological process. I had laid out the parameters of our search: the play’s premise, its setting, its major adaptations. Their imagination, alongside some guidance, brought about its manifestation. Although I had originally intended to allow the play’s conception to bubble in my own mind, and give the designers a clear world to design, it happened that I encouraged their own dream-images to deeply impact our story-telling. This is a happy accident.

B. REHEARSAL

In the rehearsal process, I intended to balance the organizational aspects integral to staging a play like this, with an invitation to the actors to touch their own unconscious, and to personalize the symbols and images of the play. In most cases, I believe this was a success. I pre-staged half of the play on paper before coming into

the rehearsal room, and had stage management grid the rehearsal floor. The grid was not used as much as I originally thought it might be, but the grid did become a metaphor we could use to ground the whirling quality of the play.

As is evident in my journal entries above, our greatest rehearsal challenges were scheduling and my conflict with K. There was a malaise in the rehearsal room from the beginning. The actors were exhausted, after coming off of their last show just a week before beginning *A Dream Play*. Some also seemed cynical, disinterested, and disenchanted about their experience at York. I was very sensitive to this. In my journals, “creating a humane rehearsal process” comes up a lot, as well the prospect of mutiny. Some of this is personal insecurity, as I point out in my journals. Some of this was a very real tension in our rehearsal room. My idea for a “circle of complaint” became a turning point in this process. Instead of allowing doubt and fear to turn to punishment, I went the other way and decided to listen.

I do believe I could have found more authority. Rules were broken in the rehearsal room. Lates remained fairly consistent. I would follow-up with this throughout the process, but it is clear that there is something I did not set from the beginning. My dream of the flailing dictator stays with me, as an amplified manifestation of a certain part of me that felt I was losing control. My encounters with K were also fraught. The irony is not lost on me: for a play that dealt with depression and mental illness, it was immensely difficult to reach the actor in the room who was dealing with this in full volume. I realize that I did not conclude this story in my

journal. Our second meeting was fruitful. K decided to stay in the project, and their behavior did change. However I do not think that they were able to achieve the best work they could have, in part because of my hesitation to be too direct with K.

I did ask the actors to voluntarily provide an anonymous 3-5 sentences describing their journey through the process. I did this in order to evaluate if I succeeded in encouraging the actors to touch their unconscious. Eleven of twenty-one responded, and the responses seem to indicate that I succeeded with this goal. Here are a few:

When I accepted the fact that in order for this to make sense to me, I have to play metaphor, things became clearer and I felt I had a purpose and intention. From there, my process was just “grab an image and go” and that’s what takes me through the play... It’s impossible to truly tell this story with an ego.

The most important thing for me was to bring deep, personal images to each scene. The play was challenging in terms of finding continuity and logic, but the only way in was to personalize this with high stakes/images.

Combustible, Rupturing, Explosive. Enraging yet calming. Enlivening yet numbing and overall a dance between light and dark.

This process, this show, truly can rock someone to the core. It sure did with me. David allowed me to explore and drop-in to the world created on (sic) my own time.

I came into this process and quickly grasped onto the atmosphere and world of the show.

The process of a Dream Play has been like a rollercoaster of emotion, thought, and intention: I have been able to find masculinity in places of my body and thought that I tend to leave untouched.

It is amazing how adamant people are about “making sense” of anything and everything. How uneasy people are about abandoning conventional daylight logic. But, of course, ANYTHING can be justified if you are just willing to

believe in it. This is what I have discovered. Logic has got nothing on FAITH. And there is great freedom in that.

My dream with this show was to surf in, riding a wave of training and momentum filled with rich images of my travels to fill the absurdity and confusion around this script. I arrived with the shore in sight but the tides began to recede, the wind quieted, and I was alone. I, alone couldn't get them moving again. I saw a sailor far away on the roof of a building, smiling, conducting the most beautiful sounding orchestra. I wanted to sing, too! I splashed and pushed the waters, blowing bubbles, kicking to make my own white caps to no avail. I was a spec in the distance. Disappointed, I kneeled on my board and plunged my head in the water to escape. There, I remembered to listen. There, I realized I could see underwater, and I could also breathe. I saw what exists immediately around me and I laughed, causing a small ripple in the water. Standing, slowly with my hair dripping wet, I felt the movement below my board once again. The waves splashing by the rock in the distance murmuring to me that the winds could come back, this time together with the music. Slowly the tides began to rise, and I saw the sailor turn and see me, he waved, the wind brushing his hair.

I find these responses encouraging. By the end of the process, I sensed we were all on board.

C. PERFORMANCE AND ONWARDS

Did the play affirm the power of liveness, virtuosity, and the invisible thing called soul or spirit? Was the play enchanting? These questions are not possible to objectively quantify. In hindsight, an audience feedback form could have helped to address this question. However, "soul and spirit" are not objective words. I can only rely on what I saw and my definition and understanding of these words. I can also translate the feedback from the individuals who decided to come talk to me and share their thoughts about the piece.

In my mind, the play was a successful work-in-progress. It struck me as unfinished on opening night, yet ready to share with an audience. Audience members have

consistently said something along the lines of not quite “getting it,” but thinking it was continually interesting and engaging. I am glad for this. One fear was that the play would be too opaque or esoteric. My desire to have the play “enchant” is connected to giving the audience just enough to keep following the story, and encouraging them to fill in the blanks.

Sarah Kane spoke about theatre being the most existential of all of the art forms. I am reminded of this now as I conclude. It is one of the most difficult art forms to provide a copy of or reproduce. After the final curtain call, the experience of the play is a trace in one’s memory, much like a dream. This is how I feel now. I am proud of its manifestation and stand by my choices. However I do not have a sense of supreme satisfaction, because it does not feel like something I own. I was true to the stage in my imagination, and yet it also felt like the dreams of other people as well. It is something that manifested, that confounded and enchanted, and that is gone. This, I think, is at the theatre’s core. I am learning that a play is a daylight dream. A dream invites the imagination and unconscious of the witness. It is both reality and metaphor, which ultimately disappears. It is the dream of its many players, and if these players succeed in tapping into the collective unconscious, it can become the dream of the one hundred individuals in the room.

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